

Presentation of Our Lord
Russian Orthodox Church
Nikolai
Alaska < YUKON-KOYUKUK

HABS No. AK-83

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
PRESENTATION OF OUR LORD RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

HABS No. AK-83

Location: Nikolai, 40 miles east of McGrath, Alaska.

Present Owner: Alaska Diocese, Orthodox Church in America.

Present Occupant: Presentation of Our Lord Russian Orthodox Church.

Present Use: Church.

Significance: A number of historic Russian Orthodox churches survive in Alaska, built by Native congregations in traditional forms. Built in 1928-29, the Presentation of Our Lord Church has a hip-roofed nave, framed by gable-roofed sanctuary and vestibule.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1928-29, according to Bobby Esai.
2. Builders: The following villagers are credited with the construction: Theodore Pitka, Deaphon Nicholai, Divaian Wassillie, Andrew Dennis, and Miska Deaphon. (Mongin and Kreta.)
3. Original plans and construction: The church was built with a hip-roofed nave and a gable-roofed sanctuary.
4. Alterations and additions: The gable-roofed vestibule, with an entrance on the south side, was added a few years after construction. In the 1980s, a porch and front doors were added to the west side.

B. Previous Churches on the Site:

The villagers moved to this site in about 1915 from Old Nikolai, about 4 miles away. Their first church here was log, situated about 20 yards northeast of the present church. The site is marked by a shrine.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The hip-roofed nave is framed by gable-roofed vestibule and sanctuary.

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2. Condition of fabric: good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The nave measures 19'-2" x 25'-0". The sanctuary on the east measures 17'-0" x 12'-0" and the vestibule on the east is 13'-10" x 12'-0".
2. Foundations: Foundations under the nave are horizontal logs. The sanctuary has a post foundation.
3. Walls: The nave walls are finished with novelty siding. The sanctuary and vestibule walls are horizontal planks, 3" to 4" wide by 8" to 9" tall. The north side of the sanctuary has plywood over these planks.
4. Structural system: The nave is wood-framed. The sanctuary and vestibule have plank walls.
5. Porch: The front porch has a low-pitched gable roof and plywood on two sides. The stoop within it is about 5'-0" square, with three steps and a balustrade.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorway and doors: The front doorway has plain double doors.
 - b. Windows: On the south side the window has six-over-six-light sash. There is one six-light window on the north.
7. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: The hipped roof over the nave has an asphalt covering.
 - b. Cupolas: There are three onion domes, mounted on small cupolas, and topped by crosses.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The nave is one open space, separated from the sanctuary on the east by the iconostas. The vestibule is on the west.
2. Stairways: There is a three-step amvon, with a semi-circular projection in the center. The warden's desk in the southwest corner of the nave is raised by two steps.
3. Flooring: The flooring is wide planks in the nave, plywood in the vestibule, and linoleum in the sanctuary.

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4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls are covered with blue oilcloth, and the ceiling is plywood. The ceiling in the vestibule is in a tray shape.
5. Doorways: There are five-panel double doors between the vestibule and the nave.
6. Decorative features: The iconostas extends the full height of the wall. The royal doors are round-arched, while the deacons doors are flat-arched with splayed lintels.
7. Mechanical equipment: The church is equipped with electricity and two wood stoves.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The building faces west, with the altar on the east end, as is traditional among Russian Orthodox churches.
2. Historic landscape design: The church is set in a churchyard fenced with logs and turkey wire. The graves, interspersed with aspens and spruces, are fenced and were painted in bright colors in 1989. The shrine of the old church is also in this churchyard.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Esai, Bobby, chief of the village and reader in the church, interviewed by author September 10, 1990.

Mongin, Alfred, and Fr. Joseph P. Kreta, "National Register Nomination: Russian Orthodox Church Buildings and Sites," National Park Service, 1979.

Wallace, Fern A. The Flame of the Candle. Chilliwack, B.C.: SS. Kyril and Methody Society, 1974. Plates 85 and 86 show the church before the front porch had been added.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Documentation of the Presentation of Our Lord Russian Orthodox Church was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), a division of the National Park Service, the state of Alaska, and the Icon Preservation Task Force. The project was executed under the general direction of Robert J. Kapsch, chief of HABS/HAER, and Boyd Evison, Alaska Regional Director, National Park Service. Recording was carried out during summer 1990 by Steven M. Peterson, project director; Jet Lowe, photographer; and Alison K. Hoagland, historian, who prepared this report.

ADDENDUM TO
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